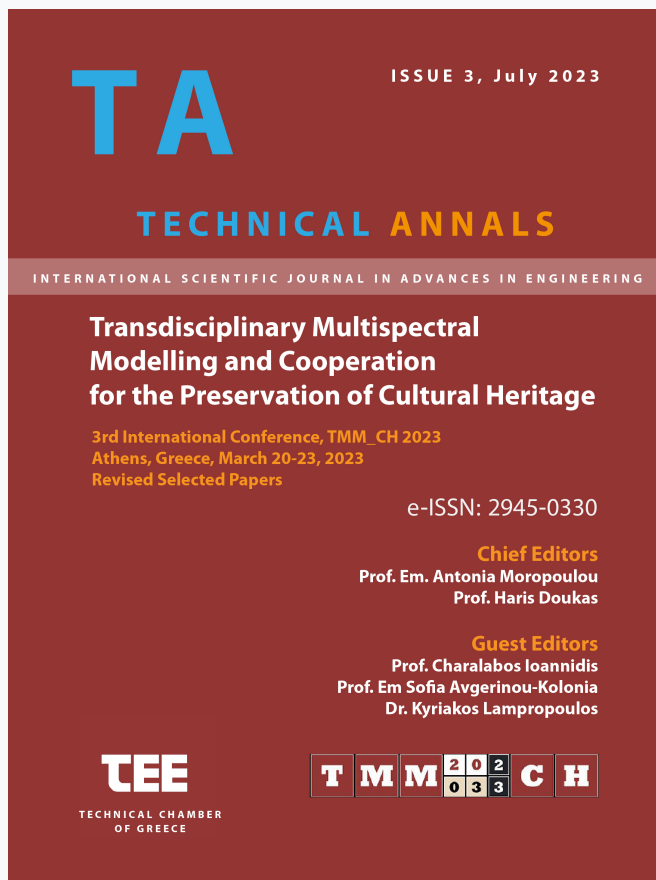


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**A code of action for the responsible conservation of squares in historic cities through the experience of northern Greece**

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# A code of action for the responsible conservation of squares in historic cities through the experience of northern Greece

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**Abstract.** The historic cities of northern Greece came to include squares as a result of modernizing urban interventions. Up until the late 19th century, the structure of social life under Byzantine and Ottoman rule made them unnecessary, with very few exceptions. It was only in the last years of Ottoman rule, and mainly under the Greek administration, after 1912, that they began to be properly integrated into the urban layout, as a symbol of modernization. In either case, they suffered considerable degradation after the Second World War and it was only in the 1980s that their historical significance began to be acknowledged. Hence, multiple conservation initiatives started to unfold, which currently allow for an appraisal, and in its wake, for the drafting of a code for optimum future action.

The present paper pursues these two goals, through two separate focuses: firstly, on the procedural, and secondly, on the technical segment of contemporary care for a characteristic selection of six squares in four historic cities of northern Greece. As concerns the technical segment, it is addressed in terms of the distribution of functions in and around the squares, and the design of the latter and the surrounding fronts.

**Keywords:** Squares, historic cities, northern Greece, functions, design.

## 1 Introduction

Currently subdivided into the regions of Macedonia and Thrace, the northern part of Greece encompasses a considerable number of cities whose history spans well over a century. Among them, Thessaloniki stands out as the oldest, having been founded in the early 4th century BC, while others, such as Veria, Xanthi, and Kastoria, date to Hellenistic, Late Roman, and Early Byzantine times, respectively. Remarkably, even in cases of such a long presence, the urban layout came to include open spaces for the convergence of circulation routes and social interaction only as of the late 19th century, and more systematically, after 1912, as modernizing urban interventions. Nowadays, however, they play a vital role in the shaping of the historical profile of the respective cities. In this context, since the 1980s, multiple conservation initiatives have unfolded,

aiming to enhance their special character. These initiatives allow for an appraisal, which in turn can produce a set of guidelines for optimum future action.

The present paper aims to conduct this appraisal, and in its wake, draw a code of action for the responsible conservation of squares, at primarily national and secondly international level. To achieve this goal, a systematic review, analysis, and evaluation of the conservation care that has been shown so far in a characteristic selection of six squares in the aforementioned four historic cities will be pursued, addressing, on one hand, the procedural, and on the other, the technical issues involved. The material for this task was provided by archival and on-site research, coupled with personal experience from related work on behalf of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

## **2 The evolution of squares in the historic cities of northern Greece**

The northern part of Greece was until the early 20th century part of the Ottoman Empire. A highly centralized state, the latter came to occupy the current regions of Macedonia and Thrace for nearly five centuries, in the course of which their cities were broken up into autonomous neighborhoods, inhabited by clusters of people sharing common religion or origin. The overall sense of a community was absent, an event which coupled with the minimal margin for independent action by the local authorities, made open communal spaces unnecessary, and hence, non-existent [1].

Nonetheless, very few, yet notable exceptions did occur. In the center of the introverted living quarters, small courtyards are known to have provided access to the neighborhood's major edifice, the religious building, in addition to offering space for the outdoor activities of its inhabitants. The inner courtyard of the Jewish quarter of Veria (contemporary Barbouta Square), is a most characteristic example, set in the center of a compact triangular layout of houses, which incorporates, at one corner, the Synagogue [2] - (see Fig. 1). On the other hand, a similarly triangular open area in the Doltso district of Kastoria (contemporary Emmanouil Brothers Square) provided the necessary space for the open-air bazaars that supplied the inhabitants of the surrounding, highly secluded Christian sector of the city with basic goods [3] - (see Fig. 2).

In the last decades of Ottoman rule, the granting of property and development rights to communities other than the ruling Muslim, part of an overdue quest for modernization, allowed certain Christian clusters to flourish and erect memorable communal buildings, next to major churches. In certain cases, this activity was combined with the arrangement of the edifices around a small open space, which facilitated projection in the cityscape, while also fostering a sense of community among the inhabitants of the surrounding quarter. This was the case of the open area west of the old Metropolitan Church of Xanthi (contemporary Metropolis Square), which was surrounded by two schools and the metropolitan residence, between 1839 - 1897 [4] - (see Fig. 3).

With the incorporation, firstly of Macedonia (1913), and secondly of Thrace (1920), in the modern Greek state, proper squares began to emerge in the historic cities of both. In an attempt to signify a new era, far from their Ottoman past, the Greek administration promoted modernization according to western standards, including the provision of

large open spaces, as points of reference for circulation and social interaction. Hence, in sharp contrast to their previous absence, squares claimed prominence in the numerous urban plans that were drawn up in the Interwar period, their most celebrated manifestations being met in the capital city of northern Greece, Thessaloniki.

The complete redesign of the historic center of the latter, after the devastating fire of 1917, produced a layout of streets around a newly established network of squares. Among them, Aristotelous Square functioned as the city's social center, next to the sea, at the start of a homonymous vertical civic axis, in combination with a unique manifestation of regulated design of the surrounding facades, in the neo-byzantine style [5, 6] - (see Fig. 4). At a short distance to the northwest, again next to the sea, Eleftherias Square assumed a major role in the city's economic life [5, 7] - (see Fig. 5), while further north, Emporiou Square served as an important hub for commercial activities [5] - (see Fig. 6).

Either originating in the very few open spaces of the Ottoman era or the multiple modernization efforts of the Interwar years, the squares of the historic cities of northern Greece suffered considerable degradation in the first decades after the Second World War, a result of tight development and unprecedented increase of traffic on their perimeter. It was only in the 1980s that their contribution to the historical profile of the respective cities began to be acknowledged, leading to the emergence of steadily multiplying initiatives for their enhancement [8]. These initiatives are comprehensively illustrated in the already distinguished six squares, a characteristic selection also in terms of type, size, and conservation needs, which therefore proves an ideal basis for an overall evaluation, through two separate focuses: firstly, on the procedural, and secondly, on the technical segment of contemporary care.

### **3 The procedural segment of contemporary care**

The preparation of projects for the conservation of the squares of the historic cities of northern Greece is the responsibility exclusively of the local authorities. In the case of the selected six squares, the latter began to produce conservation plans in the late 1990s (Barbouta Square, 1995 - 1997), followed by the bulk of the hitherto completed projects over the next two decades (Metropolis Square, first phase, early 2000s; Aristotelous Square, 2006; Emmanouil Brothers Square, early 2010s; Emporiou Square, 2012 - 2013; Eleftherias Square, 2015; Metropolis Square, second phase, 2017; Emmanouil Brothers Square, redesign, 2021).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dating based on the information provided by the Technical Services of the respective municipalities, in the archives of which one can locate the complete projects.



**Fig. 1.** Barbouta Square.



**Fig. 2.** Emmanouil Brothers Square.



**Fig. 3.** Metropolis Square.





**Fig. 4.** Aristotelous Square.



**Fig. 5.** Eleftherias Square.



**Fig. 6.** Emporiou Square.

The above initiatives attest to an undisputed interest of the local administrations in the enhancement of the form and function of the six squares, to the benefit, not only of the residents of the respective cities but also of the visitors and tourists. Yet compared to the wider European context, this interest proves rather delayed, not to mention inconsistent with a complete approach to the whole issue. The focus on the specific squares was not the result of a definition of priorities in the wake of a review and appraisal of the conservation needs of all the squares of the four historic cities. Moreover, the drafting of the projects was initiated not so much upon acknowledgment of a vital prerequisite for optimum preservation, but rather on the occasion of combined funding by the European Union and national resources being made available for related works.

As concerns the preparation of the projects, a notable issue is firstly identified in the composition of the respective planning teams. The involvement of professionals from multiple disciplines, particularly engineering, landscaping, and heritage management, does not prove firmly established. Of the hitherto completed plans, merely three were drafted on the basis of interdisciplinary cooperation (Aristotelous Square, Emporiou Square, Eleftherias Square), thus leaving a major requirement on hold.

Also noteworthy is the fact that a significant portion of the projects, namely three of them, were shaped in the wake of architectural competitions, a beneficial tool for optimum enhancement that allows contributions from independent planners. Regrettably, though, in the case of Emporiou Square and Aristotelous Square, the municipal authority chose to ignore the award-winning project in the earlier national (1994) and international architectural competition (1997), respectively. On the other hand, as concerns Eleftherias Square, the proposal that received the first prize (2013) was transformed into a complete project, which luckily secured funding. Yet shortly after the commencement of works, it was canceled by the local authority, on the grounds of the pursuit of a more profitable exploitation of the respective terrain, through the additional construction of an underground parking lot.

Worth adding is that, with the project of 2006 having not been implemented so far, the conservation of Aristotelous Square was recently addressed through yet another architectural competition (2021), whose award-winning project is expected to produce a complete plan shortly. Yet the intermediate distance is most likely to prove considerably longer. The competition's jury was not staffed with representatives of the state bodies charged with the protection of the area, namely the supervising services of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and the Ministry of the Interior. Hence, with crucial reserves over the prizewinning proposal already being expressed by both, its transformation into a feasible prospect appears, to say the least, rather distant.<sup>2</sup>

Another major issue about the hitherto followed procedures is the overall absence of consultation with the wider public. Even though the legislation defining the responsibilities of the local authorities called for consideration of the views of the local population on all matters of common interest, as early as 2006 [9], none of the projects completed thereafter followed this rule. A minor exception is witnessed only in the case of

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<sup>2</sup>See documents: (a) 469151/09-02-2023, of the Ministry of Culture and Sports/Service of Modern Monuments and Technical Works of Central Macedonia, and (b) 643/16-02-2023, of the Ministry of the Interior/Department of Traditional Settlements and Listed Buildings.

Emmanouil Brothers Square. Merely two years ago (2022), the local authority initiated consultation, yet just in terms of the accommodation of the tables and seats of a nearby restaurant, and not the overall treatment of the square.<sup>3</sup>

The scope of the so far drafted projects is a last matter that deserves attention. To begin with, though all six squares form part of wider historic ensembles, it was only in two of them that conservation was pursued, not in isolation, but in the framework of a plan for the entire wider setting, an obvious prerequisite for optimum enhancement. These are Barbouta Square (in the framework of a project for the entire network of communal spaces of the old districts of Veria) and Emporiou Square (in the framework of a complete project for the wider Chrimatistiriou Square district of Thessaloniki).

In the case of Aristotelous Square (part of the homonymous civic axis), Emmanouil Brothers Square (part of the network of communal spaces of the historic center of Kastoria), and Eleftherias Square (part of the network of communal spaces of the historic center of Thessaloniki), an isolated approach was favored, with a hopeful reversal in terms of Aristotelous Square in the near future, through the recent architectural competition that addressed the entire homonymous axis (2021). Lastly, as concerns Metropolis Square, a wider focus was initially adopted, yet in the second and main phase of works, the latter was abandoned. Hence, as in the other three cases, basic dissimilarities occurred, namely in the paving materials and urban equipment, with a negative impact on the enhancement of both the squares and the wider setting.

A second point of interest in terms of the selected scope is that, so far, all projects have dealt, exclusively, with the functional layout and overall shaping of the terrain of the squares, ignoring the equally vital distribution of functions and shaping of the fronts on their perimeter. To this day, no plan has been drafted in conjunction with a set of standards for the last two issues, thus allowing both to be regulated by building and planning rules for wider sections of the urban fabric, which are largely inconsistent with the special conservation needs of the squares. Hence, considerable room for incompatible action arises, with the only prospect of halting being the independent definition of standards by the state services charged with historic ensemble protection. Such is the case of Aristotelous Square, where the shaping of the surrounding fronts is subject to restrictions that were separately enforced, in 1983, as part of the protection of the surrounding buildings as listed assets by the Ministry of the Interior [10].

#### **4 The technical segment of contemporary care**

Apart from the procedural issues, the conservation of the selected squares proves ardently linked to technical issues, namely the distribution of functions in and around the squares' terrain, and the design of the latter and the surrounding fronts. Each is of special importance for optimum enhancement and will therefore be discussed separately, as follows.

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<sup>3</sup>See document 21414/30-05-2022 of the Municipality of Kastoria/Directorate of Financial Services.





**Fig. 7.** Aristotelous Square, facing the sea.



**Fig. 8.** Metropolis Square, view from the east section to the west parking lot.



**Fig. 9.** Metropolis Square, view with the street to the east.

#### **4.1 Distribution of functions in the squares**

As concerns the arrangement of functions in the terrain of the squares, one needs to note that, in their initial realization, all six spaces were meant to serve as open areas for social interaction and relaxation, fully accessible by pedestrians and capable of hosting outdoor events. In their present state, three of them continue to display this capacity, though to a varied degree.

Barbouta Square remains an open area, fully accessible to walkers and convenient for festivities (see Fig. 1). The same applies to Emmanouil Brothers Square and Aristotelous Square, except that considerable portions on the perimeter of the former, and two large surfaces along the long sides of the latter have been taken up by the tables and seats of surrounding cafes and restaurants (see Fig. 7). In Aristotelous Square, this development has caused significant disturbance to pedestrian movement, a result of the exaggerated size and irregularity of the occupied spaces. Substantial confinement and clear delimitation are hence necessary, as already prescribed in the 2006 conservation project, and hopefully, in the wake of its cancellation, in the upcoming plan after the architectural competition of 2021.

A rather intermediate case, Metropolis Square is cut up by a street in two open areas (see Fig. 8). Similarly to Barbouta Square, the east one is fully accessible to walkers and ideal for outdoor events. Yet in sharp contrast, the west portion has been transformed into a parking lot, a most incompatible alteration, which ought to have been averted, along with the introduction of the street in between, regardless of its overall light traffic load.

Regrettably, such alterations are also witnessed in the remaining two cases, not to mention to a much greater degree. In Emporiou Square, in the wake of the initial measures for the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire open space has been occupied by the tables and seats of the surrounding cafes and restaurants, leaving no more than a narrow path for walkers attempting to pass through (see Fig. 6). Even worse, after the cancellation of the conservation project of 2015, Eleftherias Square, already partially overlapped by a bus terminal, was transformed, in its remaining part, into a parking lot, which hinders all pedestrian movement, to say nothing of social interaction and relaxation (see Fig. 5). Both cases reflect wholly incompatible choices, which render imperative a complete and unconditional recovery of open space. A recovery already ideally prescribed, in terms of Eleftherias Square, in the 2015 enhancement plan, which promoted the creation of a fully accessible urban park, honoring the major events that marked the history of the square and Thessaloniki itself, chief among them the initial assembly and humiliation of the city's Jewish community by the Nazis, in 1942.

#### **4.2 Distribution of functions around the squares**

In addressing the arrangement of functions around the terrain of the squares, it is essential to note that, with the exception of the introverted -hence inaccessible to vehicles- Barbouta Square, from the very start, the remaining five spaces have been either bordered by streets on all sides (Aristotelous, Eleftherias, Emmanouil Brothers, and Metropolis Squares) or placed on the intersection of streets (Emporiou Square). Hence,

with the increase in vehicle traffic in recent years, the adjacent streets nowadays emerge as possible obstacles to the squares' enhancement.

Fortunately, this concern has been so far met with considerable positive action. In the case of Emmanouil Brothers Square and Metropolis Square, the traffic load was reduced to a minimum, primarily by narrowing the vehicle routes to the least required width and by laying them with relatively rough and uneven setts (see Fig. 9). On the other hand, from very early on, the streets bordering the long sides of Aristotelous Square were converted into pedestrian lanes (see Fig. 7), as was, more recently, the picturesque Aghiou Mina street that leads to Emporiou Square, in conjunction with a confinement of the width of the remaining vehicle routes to an absolute minimum.

Clearly beneficial, both in terms of the enhancement of the squares and the meeting of contemporary needs, the above interventions leave only two major issues to be resolved. The first is the elimination of car parking around Emmanouil Brothers Square and Metropolis Square (see Fig. 3), a degrading factor that could be eradicated with the installation of discreet bollards. The second is the facilitation of pedestrian access to Aristotelous Square and Eleftherias Square, given their immediate adjacency with streets of heavy traffic load.

With a new conservation project for the former currently underway and the one completed for the latter in 2015 proposing merely the establishment of pedestrian crossings at selected points, an adequate solution for the two squares remains to be reached, given the large flow of walkers to both, and in particular from Thessaloniki's immensely popular seafront. If optimum enhancement is to be achieved for the city's two most prominent and historically significant open spaces, drastic approaches ought to be considered, possibly involving the conversion of the avenue bordering the squares from the side of the sea into a pedestrian route, or even the relocation of the avenue below ground, leaving a fully open terrain for the numerous scrollers.

Except for the streets, the selected squares are bordered by buildings, whose functions reflect greatly on the preservation of the special character of the respective spaces. Solid proof to this remark is foremostly provided by Barbouta Square, Metropolis Square, and Aristotelous Square. In all three of them, the surrounding edifices have largely retained their original functions, both communal (religious and educational) and private (residential, office, and recreational), with the mere exception of the fully compatible conversion of certain of Barbouta's houses into boutique hotels. Hence, the genuine spirit of the three spaces has remained basically untouched and easily identifiable, particularly the striking tranquility of the introverted Barbouta Square (see Fig. 10) and the lively atmosphere of the iconic Aristotelous Square (see Fig. 11).

The same does not apply in the case of the remaining three squares, mainly as a result of the recent multiplication of originally non-existent or far fewer recreational uses on their perimeter. In Emmanouil Brothers Square and Eleftherias Square, the current balance between the initially dominant functions on the ground floor of the surrounding buildings (residential and financial - traveling, respectively) and recreation remains in favor of the former, yet with the prospect of a reversal being imminent. Hence, specific rules need to be set, also covering the uses of the upper floors, where, for the time being, no substantial deviation from the original functional schemes (residential and financial - office - hotel, respectively) is noted. Such care is much more urgently required for

Emporiou Square, where recreation has already prevailed over the initially dominant commercial uses on the ground floor, while hotels are gradually erasing the offices and workshops on the upper floors, thus depriving the square of its genuine, commercial context (see Figs. 12, 13).

### **4.3 Design of the squares**

To begin a discussion of the design of the six squares, one must first exclude Eleftherias Square, since its present use as a bus terminal and parking lot has established an overall disposition that is totally alien to that of a square (see Fig. 5). Secondly, it is important to note that the remaining five spaces have not preserved to this day any original features. Hence, their design is a case of entirely contemporary shaping, with two major points of reference, namely historical essence and modern needs.

To this end, the five squares display, at present, a largely common disposition: a flat terrain, with a clear central space, surrounded by features for rest (see Figs. 1 - 4, 6). Though barely notable, this arrangement does feature two beneficial characteristics. By remaining free, the central area allows unrestricted views of the surrounding building fronts, and in the case of Aristotelous Square, of the sea and the imposing Mount Olympus, the highest mountain of Greece, which was intended to serve as a focal point from the very start (see Fig. 7). On the other hand, the central spaces prove easily accessible from the perimeter of the squares, except for the barriers set by the equipment of nearby cafes and restaurants on the long sides of Aristotelous Square, and the merely two points of entry in Barbouta Square. The latter constitute, however, an original specificity, whose preservation has underlined the site's introverted character.

Upon further observation, one notes that, apart from Aristotelous Square, the terrain of the remaining spaces is laid with a limited number of hard materials, either traditional (stones, setts) or modern (cast paving), yet wholly sympathetic, in plain patterns (see Figs. 1, 2, 9). Hence, from the aesthetic viewpoint, a fully compatible result is achieved, along with a positive minimization of the ecological imprint, due to the local origin of the selected means. By contrast, Aristotelous Square has attracted over the years a wide variety of mostly incompatible modern materials, in a truly unbalanced composition (see Fig. 14), which needs to be reconsidered, if a substantial contribution to the enhancement of Thessaloniki's most prominent open space is to be secured.

A major issue as concerns the paving of the squares is that it occupies almost their entire surface. Greenery and water features prove unexpectedly absent, given the local climate (cold winters and particularly hot summers), with limited exceptions: the relatively small grass plots and scarce trees of Aristotelous Square (see Fig. 7), and the barely adequate trees on the perimeter of Barbouta Square, Emporiou Square, and Emmanouil Brothers Square (see Figs. 1, 2, 6), in the case of the latter with an incomprehensible diminishment pending, under the most recent of conservation projects to be completed for the six squares (see Fig. 15). Hence, a confinement of hard surfaces in favor of vegetation and water proves necessary, yet without erasing the central open area and obstructing the view of the surrounding fronts and landscape features.



**Fig. 10.** Barbouta Square.



**Fig. 11.** Aristotelous Square.



**Fig. 12.** Typical building on the perimeter of Emporiou Square in the 1980s, with shops on the ground floor and offices further up.



**Fig. 13.** The same building today, with a cafe - restaurant on the ground floor and a hotel on the upper stories.



**Fig. 14.** Aristotelous Square, with four distinct types of paving.



**Fig. 15.** Redesign of Emmanouil Brothers Square, 2021.

Another crucial chapter in the design of the squares is urban equipment. Except for Emporiou Square, the selected spaces display a beneficial installation of a minimum of elements (benches, tree tubs, bollards, light posts, litter bins, and occasionally drinking



fountains), which could be slightly expanded (tree seats, cycle racks, and educational features). The hitherto installed items are of rather plain, yet conventional form, leaving the ideal alternative of specially designed elements inactive. In addition, an unnecessary introduction of two separate types of a single feature is noted in certain spaces, namely two types of light posts in Aristotelous Square, and two types of sitting posts in Emmanouil Brothers Square and Metropolis Square (see Fig. 8).

Emporiou Square displays a more refined and uniform picture, being the only one so far to accommodate specially designed benches, carefully regulated lighting, and unique microclimate enhancement features (see Fig. 6). Worth noting, though, is that lighting has not been determined in conjunction with the lighting of the perimetric facades. Moreover, the scale and disposition of the microclimate enhancement features, namely a huge dome-like frame supporting a fan and a low-height water curtain, have caused irreparable aesthetic damage, in addition to obstructing the observation of the surrounding fronts (see Fig. 16). At the same time, the square is cluttered with the freely deployed furniture of the surrounding cafes and restaurants, an assembly of multiple, disparate, and largely incompatible features, which is also met at Aristotelous Square and Emmanouil Brothers Square. The adoption of a wider perspective as concerns lighting, and the introduction of discreet bioclimatic features and limited recreation equipment of common, plain, and elegant form is, therefore, a vital necessity, along with a clear delineation of the areas to be occupied by the latter.

A positive aspect in the hitherto pursued designs is the overall arrangement of wiring in underground channels, rather than on overground posts, which would have caused significant aesthetic disturbance. On the other hand, a notable deficiency is identified in the absence of substantial care for the needs of people with disabilities. Apart from the peripheral incorporation of tactile paving in Emporiou Square, the remaining spaces have nothing more to offer than a flat terrain, suitably even only in Aristotelous Square and Emmanouil Brothers Square.

On the whole, if a case of truly outstanding design, with a beneficial impact on the site's historic significance and the city's contemporary needs, was to be identified, that would certainly be the regrettably unrealized project of 2015 for Eleftherias Square. Its plan for a walkable green surface at the center of the square, complemented by plain paving, carefully arranged trees, simple, elegant, and mostly specially designed urban equipment, discreet bioclimatic features, aids for the blind, and subtle reminders of the square's exceptional history would have created a truly coveted space in the historic center of Thessaloniki (see Fig. 17).

#### **4.4 Design of the surrounding fronts**

The shaping of the surrounding fronts plays a vital role in the overall effort to highlight the special character of a square. In the case of the selected six spaces, this task is confined to the treatment of existing facades, as none is bordered by empty plots, which would additionally set forth the issue of sensitive modern development.

To be more precise, the surrounding fronts are composed of the facades, on one hand of historic buildings, most already listed, and on the other, modern structures, largely of minimal aesthetic interest. As regards the former, one notes an overall preservation of their distinctive form and separate features, particularly in Barbouta Square,

Metropolis Square, and Emmanouil Brothers Square (see Fig. 18). The latter actually displays the only notable deficiency among them, namely limited dispersion of disfiguring wiring, air-conditioning units, and restaurant signs. As regards the remaining three squares, additional concern is justified, as on the ground floor, the accommodated shops, cafes, and restaurants have opted for highly distinguishable, yet equally disturbing design, in terms of coloring, texture, and added equipment (see Fig. 19). In both cases, the restoration of the morphological unity of the respective fronts ought to be promoted, along with all necessary maintenance works and care for lighting enhancement, which is currently limited.

As concerns the surrounding modern structures, Aristotelous Square gathers none. In Barbouta Square, Metropolis Square, and Emmanouil Brothers Square, a positive establishment of relatively moderate fronts is noted, with a considerable margin for improvement (removal of disfiguring shelters, signs, and mechanical units). In Eleftherias Square and Emporiou Square, a similar situation remains to be witnessed, due to the vivid morphological disruption caused by the shops, cafes, and restaurants on the ground floor and the free deployment of signs and air-conditioning units on the upper floors (see Fig. 20). Hence, substantial remedial action needs to be taken, a task resting entirely with the respective owners, as are the necessary works on the historic buildings, which in absence of special subsidy schemes and collective conscience, are all too often disregarded.



**Fig. 16.** Emporiou Square, view below the domed frame.



**Fig. 17.** Redesign proposal for Eleftherias Square, 2015.





**Fig. 18.** Metropolis Square, with view of the surrounding building fronts.



**Fig. 19.** Emporiou Square, view of the impact of recreation on a listed building.



**Fig. 20.** Eleftherias Square, view of the fronts of surrounding modern buildings.

## 5 Conclusions

The preceding appraisal of the hitherto displayed care for the selected six squares has highlighted a wide array of successes and weaknesses, which allow for a set of guidelines to be set, in the form of a code of action for the responsible conservation of the squares of the historic cities of northern Greece, and possibly the wider European context, as follows:

- 1) The conservation of the squares requires sustained care, starting with a review and appraisal of the needs of all the open communal spaces of the historic city, and passing on to the preparation of conservation projects, regardless of the availability or not of funding. These projects ought to be drafted through interdisciplinary cooperation, ideally following the award-winning proposals of architectural competitions, and in consultation with the state services charged with historic buildings and sites protection, and the general public.
- 2) The conservation project should initially address the characteristics and needs of the square's wider setting, in all its possibly multiple manifestations (historic center, civic axis, residential neighborhood). Upon focusing on the square itself, it should deal, not only with the functional and morphological arrangement of its terrain but also with the disposition of the uses and the shaping of the fronts on its perimeter.
- 3) The functional layout of the square's terrain ought to provide for an open area that is fully and unconditionally accessible by pedestrians, eliminating vehicle circulation and parking, in addition to clearly defining appropriately sized plots for the outdoor segment of recreational uses. If the square is bordered by streets, steps should be taken to facilitate pedestrian access, including the relocation of vehicle routes, even below ground, and their transformation into pedestrian lanes, or at least the reduction of vehicle traffic to an absolute minimum. The surrounding buildings need to preserve their original functions, with conversions conducted to the extent that the genuine spirit of the place remains untouched.
- 4) The design of the square's terrain ought to preserve all noteworthy original features. If no such elements have survived, a clear central space should be established, enjoying easy access from its perimeter and combining sympathetic paving (preferably of local materials) with greenery and water features in a balanced whole, which will reflect the local climate and allow unrestricted views of the surrounding fronts and landscape features. Moreover, the square ought to be furnished with all appropriate, yet not unnecessarily multiple urban equipment, preferably specially designed, in plain, elegant, and discreet forms, along with care for microclimate enhancement, facilitation of enjoyment by people with disabilities, underground wiring, carefully regulated lighting, in conjunction with the lighting of the perimetric facades, and deployment of the least required, uniform outdoor furniture by surrounding recreational functions.
- 5) The morphological unity of the fronts of the historic buildings surrounding the square ought to be fully preserved and highlighted, along with the establishment of a moderate aesthetic impact by the perimetric modern structures. To this end, next to the conduct of necessary conservation and lighting enhancement works,

the adoption of compatible design by shops and recreation firms on the ground floor and the absence of disfiguring features on the upper floors (e.g. shelters, signs, wiring, and mechanical units) needs to be secured.

As with conservation itself, the application of the above code should rest with the local authorities, notwithstanding the need for a supplementary promotion of special subsidy schemes, and above all, collective sensitivity for the preservation of the squares' historic significance and simultaneous adjustment to contemporary needs.

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